

**Unit of Study: Academic Language
(AXES Paragraphs)
Content Overview
Wendy Bosworth**

Unit Length: 3 weeks

Introduction - AXES is an academic writing strategy for students. When students become proficient with the format, they begin to develop “habits of mind.” For example, the students learn to not only give examples for their opinions, but they also provide explanations for these examples. This means that the students support their ideas with evidence and clarify their ideas. Thus, they are able to write well-organized and developed paragraphs.

Materials:

- Character Traits
- AXES Paragraph Structure Definition
- Index of Templates for I.R.E.
- Whitewashing the Fence (or other short story) – Houghton Mifflin *Bridges to Literature*
- Eleven* by Sandra Cisneros
- Handout on Writing Quotes from Text
- AXES Transition Words Chart
- Novel
- AXES Template for Comparing and Contrasting Characters
- No Transition in an Essay
- Transitions in an Essay

Week-by-Week Overview

Week 1: Writing Personal Assertions
Definitions of AXES

Week 2: Quoting to Support Assertion from Text

Week 3: Using Transitions Within AXES paragraphs

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Week One – Focus: Writing Personal Assertions

Mini Lessons -

1. Students read and discuss a list of character traits (page 1). Class will discuss character traits and identify two of their own personal traits. They can discuss these in groups. Students complete a pre-assessment using *Whitewashing the Fence* on page 144 in *Bridges to Literature*. Students answer the following question:
What is a character trait of Tom? How do you know this?
2. The teacher will define the terms “assertions” and “examples” from the AXES Paragraph Structure Definition handout (page 2) Students write an assertion about one of their own traits and provide an example of the trait.
3. Using the handout AXES Paragraph Structure Definition handout (page 2), the teacher will define the term “explanation” and explain how it can support an example. The teacher says, “What does it mean when someone is _____(trait)_____?” The class will use the stem, “This means_____.” The students will write explanations for their personal character traits.
4. The teacher will define the term “significance,” using the AXES Paragraph Structure Definition handout (page 2). The teacher will ask, “How does our understanding of your character trait better help us to understand you?” Students write the significance of their character trait.

Week Two – Focus: Writing Assertions and Examples of Text

Mini- Lessons –

1. After reading *Eleven* by Sandra Cisneros, students write an assertion about the main character’s traits. Students also write an example from the text. Students use the handout Index of Templates for I.R.E. (page 3) and Burning Questions Template Example (page 4) to introduce quotations from the text.
2. Students write an explanation of the example and explain the significance.

Week Three – Focus: Using Transitions to Connect Sentences

Mini-Lessons -

1. The teacher introduces the AXES Transition Word Chart handout (page 5).
2. The teacher reads Transitions in an Essay (page 6) that includes transition words. Then the teacher reads the same text that does not include the transition words (page 7). The teacher asks “What is the function of the transition words? How did the transition words help you to understand the text?”
3. While reading the novel (I use *Maroo of the Winter Caves*), the teacher introduces the AXES template, AXES – Compare and Contrast Characters. The students complete the AXES Compare and Contrast Characters template (page 8) to compare and contrast the main characters of the book. See student example (page 9). Included is the AXES Paragraph Rubric for this assignment (page 10).

After working with the Capri teachers grades 4-6, we developed the attached Grade Sequencing Chart for AXES Transition Words (page 11).

CHARACTER TRAITS

kind
boastful
quiet
unfriendly
abrasive
sensitive
introverted
relaxed
religious
proud
liberal
tough
considerate
generous
studious
selfish
greedy
loud
gregarious
happy
mature
responsible
perceptive
tactful
materialistic
aware
impulsive
content
ambitious
honest
creative
musical
loner
talkative

jovial
free
straight
odd
blunt
tender
honest
conservative
loving
energetic
shy
open
friendly
jealous
naïve
stubborn
controlled
careless
wishful
timid
confident
dependable
tense
uncomplicated
afraid
thoughtful
self-reliant
submissive
striving
cooperative
concerned
courageous
heroic
sneaky

intelligent
trusting
bright
manipulative
cheerful
skillful
competent
caring
frank
rude
innovative
wise
complex
realistic
reasonable
imaginative
powerful
conforming
likable or likeable
easy-going
assertive
optimistic
nervous
dissatisfied
disorganized
adequate
adequate
resentful
insecure
enthusiastic
helpful
popular
artistic
secretive

AXES Paragraph Structure Definition

2

This year you will be writing paragraphs in a structured format commonly known as "AXES." AXES is an acronym for the four parts of a paragraph that you will be learning and using. This structure will later be used for the body paragraphs of an essay. Those four parts are explained below.

A

Assertion: An assertion is your claim for the paragraph. It should be a statement that uses key words from your writing prompt. Although sometimes it is referred to as a topic sentence, an assertion goes beyond stating a topic; an assertion takes a stand or makes a claim about an issue. An assertion should not be obvious or self-explanatory, but should be clear.

X*

Example: An example is the evidence required to support your assertion. Most often an example is a quote or passage from the readings that proves or confirms your assertion.

E*

Explanation: The explanation reveals how the example actually supports or proves the assertion. The explanation should be clear and specific. Explanation should never repeat or "translate" the quoted example.

*Xs and Es may be repeated until all the information given in your claim is proved!

S

Significance: In literary analysis, significance is shown through insightful statements that tell the reader what makes your assertion important. It should connect your assertion to real-life human experience or the world/society at large. It may also explore the author's purpose in writing the text. As part of an essay, the significance reveals how the paragraph supports the paper's thesis.

INTRODUCE

Introducing Standard Views

- Americans today tend to believe that _____.
- Common sense seems to dictate that _____.
- It is often said that _____.
- You would think that _____.
- Many people assumed that _____.

Making What They Say Something you say

- I've always believed that _____.
- When I was a child, I used to think that _____.
- Although I should know better by now, I cannot help thinking that _____.
- At the same that I believe _____, I also believe _____.

Capturing Authorial Action

- X acknowledges that _____.
- X agrees that _____.
- X argues that _____.
- X believes that _____.
- X claims that _____.
- X complains that _____.
- X concedes that _____.
- X demonstrates that _____.
- X emphasizes that _____.
- X insists that _____.
- X observes that _____.
- X questions whether _____.
- X refutes the claim that _____.
- X reminds us that _____.
- X reports that _____.
- X suggests that _____.
- X urges us to _____.

REPRODUCE

Introducing Quotations

- X states, "_____."
- According to X, "_____."
- X himself writes, "_____."
- In her book, _____, X maintains that "_____."
- In X's view, "_____."
- X agrees when she writes, "_____."
- X disagrees when he writes, "_____."
- X complicates the matters further when he writes, "_____."

EXPLAIN

Explaining Quotations

- Basically, X is saying _____.
- In other words, X believes _____.
- In making this comment, X argues that _____.
- X is insisting that _____.
- X's point is that _____.

A Burning Question- AXES

Directions: Use the following sentence starters to write a well-crafted AXES paragraph on the main idea of "A Burning Question".

A= Assertion

Write the main idea of the essay using the following sentence starter-

Ecologists believe forest fires are important because _____.

X= Example

Write an example of how forest fires can be good using the following sentence starter-

Forest fires can help because "Quote from essay that supports your main idea goes here".

E= Explanation (1-2 sentences)

Explain what your example means in your own words by using the following sentence starter-

This shows that _____.

Or

This means _____.

X= Example

Write another example of how forest fires can be good using the following sentence starter-

Another way forest fires can help is "Quote from essay that supports your main idea goes here".

E= Explanation (1-2 sentences)

Explain what your example means in your own words by using the following sentence starter-

This shows that _____.

Or

This means _____.

S= Significance

Explain why this information is important. How could this information help us?

Understanding how forest fires help us is important because _____.

See the back for how your paragraph will look when complete...

AXES Transition Words Chart	
Cause and Effect as a result so consequently therefore accordingly hence	Addition also in addition besides in fact moreover so too
Conclusion in conclusion therefore as a result to summarize consequently in short in sum, then it follows, then the upshot of all this is that thus to sum up	Concession of course naturally although it is true that admittedly granted I concede that of course naturally to be sure
Comparison similarly likewise along the same lines in the same way	Example for example for instance specifically after all as an illustration consider specifically to take a case in point
Contrast however although despite the fact on the other hand by contrast conversely even though in contrast nevertheless nonetheless on the contrary regardless whereas while yet	Elaboration actually in other words to put it another way in short by extension that is to put it bluntly to put it succinctly ultimately

Transitions in an Essay

Sample Student Work for Grade Seven - California

Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008

Dear Mr. Principal,

Once while I was at home doing my homework, the power went out in my house, so I couldn't use the computer for my homework! The money that the school district has provided should be spent on new books and computers for the school library. This would help the students at the school immensely for the following reasons: **First**, having new books would give the students more of a variety of reading material. **Second**, it would be giving the students an excellent place to do their homework. **Third**, it would help the students study better.

First of all, the kids would have a large selection of books to read, whether it was school books or chapter books. **Because no two kids are the same**, all students like to read about different topics. If the library had only limited amounts of stories, not many people would be visiting the library. **Also**, more books in the library would allow the kids to broaden their minds. They would not be learning much if they were exposed to the same vocabulary every day. More books gives them a chance to learn new words and build a better imagination. **Although reading just for pleasure is fun**, students need to work, too.

Next, if the library had books and computers, it would be an ideal place for students to get their work done. Many of the students at school have a sport or another kind of activity after school. Many times they finish with their sport and are tired, so they don't want to or have time to do their homework. If the library was stocked with homework books and computers, the kids could get their work finished during lunch break. They would not be tired and could think better, which results with a better grades. **Besides thinking better**, the computers in the library would be a great addition. The students would be allowed to finish tough essays at school, and do the easier work at home. **That would mean** they would have time to play or talk with friends, because they finish faster.

Lastly, having their homework books and computers to type with in the library would help by letting the students use it at a convenient time. Some of the kids lose their books, so they can't use them for homework. If books were in the library, they wouldn't have to be stressed or worried over their work. **Also**, the computers would really help all of the students, because they could have a quiet environment to type essays that need time to think. At some kid's homes, they may have younger siblings making so much noise they would not be able to concentrate. If they were able to go to the library, they would work more efficiently and be relaxed.

In all, the money given by the school district should be spent on library books and computers. It would be helping everyone by having different things to read, a nice area to do their homework, and being able to study better and more often. If the library had books and computers, everyone would benefit in some way.

Sincerely,
(omitted)

No Transitions in an Essay**Sample Student Work for Grade Seven - California****Persuasive Writing Task Administered on April 29 and 30, 2008**

Dear Mr. Principal,

Once while I was at home doing my homework, the power went out in my house, so I couldn't use the computer for my homework! The money that the school district has provided should be spent on new books and computers for the school library. This would help the students at the school immensely for the following reasons: having new books would give the students more of a variety of reading material. It would be giving the students an excellent place to do their homework. It would help the students study better.

The kids would have a large selection of books to read, whether it was school books or chapter books. All students like to read about different topics. If the library had only limited amounts of stories, not many people would be visiting the library. More books in the library would allow the kids to broaden their minds. They would not be learning much if they were exposed to the same vocabulary every day. More books gives them a chance to learn new words and build a better imagination. Students need to work, too.

It would be an ideal place for students to get their work done. Many of the students at school have a sport or another kind of activity after school. Many times they finish with their sport and are tired, so they don't want to or have time to do their homework. If the library was stocked with homework books and computers, the kids could get their work finished during lunch break. They would not be tired and could think better, which results with a better grades. The computers in the library would be a great addition. The students would be allowed to finish tough essays at school, and do the easier work at home. They would have time to play or talk with friends, because they finish faster.

Having their homework books and computers to type with in the library would help by letting the students use it at a convenient time. Some of the kids lose their books, so they can't use them for homework. If books were in the library, they wouldn't have to be stressed or worried over their work. The computers would really help all of the students, because they could have a quiet environment to type essays that need time to think. At some kid's homes, they may have younger siblings making so much noise they would not be able to concentrate. If they were able to go to the library, they would work more efficiently and be relaxed.

The money given by the school district should be spent on library books and computers. It would be helping everyone by having different things to read, a nice area to do their homework, and being able to study better and more often. If the library had books and computers, everyone would benefit in some way.

Sincerely,
(omitted)

AXES – Compare and Contrast Characters

Name _____

Date _____

Comparison

A = In the book _____ both of the characters, _____ and _____, have several common character traits. _____ (transition word example), both of these characters are _____.

E = We know this because on page _____ the author says that _____, “ _____.”

X = This means that _____.

E = _____ (transition word addition), on page _____ the author tells us that _____.

S = _____ (transition word conclusion) that _____.

Contrast

A = These characters also have some differences. One difference is _____.

E= We know because _____ writes

“ _____.”

X = This means that _____.

E = _____ (transition word addition), on page _____ the author says that , “ _____.”

S = My conclusion then, is that, _____.

Axes Paragraph

In the book Maroo of the Winter Caves, both of the characters, Maroo and Otak, have several common character traits. For instance, both of these characters are brave. We know this because on page 58 Maroo says, "You will fall, let me go. I can splint the arm. This means that she is not scared of perilous tasks. Also, on page 60 the author states, "Otak and Rivo had gone. They were looking for an easier way to get down." This means that Maroo and Otak were probably raised to be brave or being brave is just in their blood. In conclusion, we know that Maroo and Otak are both courageous.

These characters also have some differences. One difference is that Otak is adventurous and Maroo is helpful. We know this because the author writes, "Maroo went to go gather herbs for Old Mother so she can make it into flavored hot water." This means that if she doesn't get herbs, probably no one will, so she works extra hard to help her family. In addition, on page 25 Otak says "I wanted to fish! Why didn't you wait for me?" Therefore that quote is saying that Otak likes to fish and hunt. My conclusion then, is that both of these characters have character traits that help them to survive in the ancient times.

AXES Paragraph Rubric

	5	4	3	2	1
A Assertion	Assertion <i>thoroughly</i> addresses the prompt. Assertion makes a <i>thoughtful</i> and <i>precise</i> claim.	Assertion addresses the prompt. Assertion makes a <i>clear</i> and <i>appropriate</i> claim.	Assertion <i>may not fully</i> address the prompt. Assertion may be <i>obvious</i> or <i>somewhat</i> inaccurate.	Assertion <i>does not</i> address the prompt. Assertion makes a <i>weak</i> or <i>inaccurate</i> claim.	Assertion is <i>missing</i> or <i>off topic</i> . Assertion <i>does not</i> make a claim relevant to the prompt.
X Examples	Examples <i>clearly</i> support the assertion and demonstrate <i>detailed</i> and <i>insightful</i> understanding of the text.	Examples support the assertion and demonstrate an <i>accurate</i> understanding of the text.	Examples may <i>somewhat</i> support the assertion and demonstrate a <i>basic</i> understanding of the text. Paragraph may offer <i>too few</i> examples.	Examples <i>do not</i> support the thesis and demonstrate <i>limited</i> understanding of the text. Paragraph offers <i>too few</i> and/ or <i>irrelevant</i> examples.	Examples <i>do not</i> support the assertion and demonstrate a <i>lack</i> of understanding of the text. Examples may be <i>missing</i> or <i>off topic</i> .
E Explanation	Explanation is <i>thoroughly</i> developed and <i>specifically</i> demonstrates how the examples support the assertion.	Explanation is developed and <i>clearly</i> demonstrates how the examples support the assertion	Explanation <i>attempts</i> to demonstrate how the examples prove the assertion, but <i>may lack</i> development or <i>drift off</i> topic.	Explanation <i>does not</i> demonstrate how the examples prove the assertion. Explanation may <i>paraphrase</i> the examples, be <i>irrelevant</i> or <i>missing</i> .	Explanation <i>does not</i> demonstrate how the examples prove the assertion. Explanation is <i>missing</i> or <i>irrelevant</i> .
S Significance	Paragraph <i>perceptively</i> addresses the importance of the argument to the overall thesis, author's purpose, and/ or modern human experience.	Paragraph addresses the importance of the argument to the overall thesis, author's purpose, and/ or modern human experience.	Paragraph <i>may attempt</i> to address the importance of the argument, but significance may be <i>irrelevant</i> , <i>underdeveloped</i> , or <i>difficult to understand</i> .	Paragraph <i>does not</i> address the importance of the argument.	Paragraph <i>does not</i> address the importance of the argument or topic.
C Conventions	Writing demonstrates <i>very few</i> errors in spelling, usage, grammar, and mechanics. Vocabulary is <i>varied</i> and <i>mature</i> .	Writing demonstrates <i>few</i> errors in spelling, usage, grammar, and mechanics. Vocabulary is <i>clear</i> and <i>appropriate</i> to the task.	Writing demonstrates <i>several</i> errors in spelling, usage, grammar, and mechanics. Vocabulary is <i>limited</i> and/ or <i>repetitive</i> .	Writing demonstrates <i>many</i> errors in spelling, usage, grammar, and mechanics. Vocabulary is <i>simple</i> and/ or <i>inappropriate</i> to the task.	Writing demonstrates <i>no control</i> in spelling, usage, grammar, and mechanics. Vocabulary is <i>inappropriate</i> and/ or <i>incomprehensible</i> .

AXES Transition Words – Grade Sequencing			
	3 rd /4 th Grade	5 th Grade	6 th Grade
Cause and Effect	as a result so	consequently therefore	accordingly hence since it follows then thus
Conclusion	in conclusion therefore	as a result to summarize	consequently in short in sum, then it follows, then the upshot of all this is that thus to sum up
Comparison	similarly	likewise	along the same lines in the same way
Contrast	however although	despite the fact on the other hand	by contrast conversely even though in contrast nevertheless nonetheless on the contrary regardless whereas while yet
Addition	also in addition	besides in fact	moreover so too
Concession	of course naturally	although it is true that admittedly	granted I concede that of course naturally to be sure
Example	for example for instance	specifically after all	as an illustration consider specifically to take a case in point